



*Route 66 to medical literature*



*DFGSM3 Free Ride - Saloon*

**« The Emotional Epidemiology of H1N1 Influenza Vaccination »**

NEJM Volume 361, November 26, 2009, Number 22, <http://content.nejm.org/cgi/reprint/NEJMp0911047v1.pdf>

**Format: 250 words**

Fighting an epidemic is more than just ensuring the adequate supplies of vaccine. What happened this year with the H1N1 flu epidemic should be a lesson for the future.

The emotional epidemic of the public psyche evolved in different waves: first infection, then a certain amount of tolerance, and finally indifference.

There was a first wave of fear of the unknown, of a new illness emerging from a 3<sup>rd</sup>-world city packed with people, novel and mysterious, spreading rapidly. This is when everybody wanted to be vaccinated even though they do not generally accept seasonal influenza vaccine.

People were all the more anxious as other examples of such potential epidemics like HIV, Ebola virus, SARS or Typhoid are still haunting their minds with thrillers and movies which increase the psychological contagion of myth and suspicion.

Then, after some time, a certain degree of emotional tolerance was reached although there was no medical basis for this decreased vigilance as unusual risk groups should have raised concern, and people started to reconsider the necessity of vaccination.

Finally, as the production of a vaccine was delayed, suspicion spread. This could not be allayed by rational explanations on the variety of influenza strains. When the vaccine was finally available trust was lacking and people did not want to be vaccinated.

What was shown by this year's H1N1 influenza is that the psychological aspect of an epidemic must be addressed with immediate strong defensive pressure if we want to be able to control the spread of a disease.

**252 words**

<http://medicalenglish.univ-nantes.fr>